



UNITED STATES DEPARTMENT OF COMMERCE
Office of the Under Secretary for
Oceans and Atmosphere
Washington, D.C. 20230

December 21, 2000

To All Reviewers:

In accordance with provisions of the National Environmental Policy Act (NEPA) of 1969, we have enclosed for your review the Draft Environmental Impact Statement (DEIS) regarding the proposed Anadromous Fish Agreements and Habitat Conservation Plans (HCPs) for the Wells, Rocky Reach and Rock Island Hydroelectric Projects. A summary document was provided instead of the complete DEIS if appropriate based on your earlier request. Please note, comments on these documents must be postmarked by March 29, 2001.

The HCPs proposed by the Chelan and Douglas County Public Utility Districts (PUDs) were submitted to the National Marine Fisheries Service in connection with the PUDs' individual incidental take permit applications pursuant to Section 10(a)(2)(A) of the Endangered Species Act (ESA). The proposed HCPs are intended to minimize and mitigate any such incidental take of endangered anadromous fish. In addition, the proposed HCPs are intended to serve as proposed agreements to satisfy the PUD's obligations under the Federal Power Act and related Federal and State laws governing project effects on anadromous fish and their habitat. The proposed HCPs were developed over several years of negotiations with Federal and State resource agencies, Native American Tribes, and with American Rivers (a non-governmental environmental organization) for the purpose of both protecting anadromous fish species in the Mid-Columbia River basin in central Washington state and providing the PUDs with some degree of certainty for the long-term operation of their hydroelectric projects. While these negotiations produced proposed agreements on many important issues, it should be noted that not all parties are in support of the HCPs as currently proposed. NMFS has determined that we are unable to execute the agreements until a public review, the requisite environmental reviews, and Federal/Tribal consultations have been completed.

This DEIS is the direct result of the environmental review. It considers the environmental consequences of three alternatives: 1) no action, 2) ESA coverage pursuant to section 7(a)(2), and 3) ESA coverage pursuant to section 10(a)(1)(B). Alternative 1, the no action alternative, would result in continuation of the status quo. Alternative 2 would require the Federal Energy Regulatory Commission to implement all measures necessary to aid in the recovery of listed species, up to full mitigation of the project effects, although only limited measures would be applied to currently unlisted species. Alternative 3 would utilize the no net impact standard, as described in the EIS, and the implementation processes set forth in the proposed HCPs to both protect currently listed species and to further protect and enhance the remaining Plan species in an attempt to prevent future listings; The results of implementing each of these alternatives on the human environment have been assessed in the DEIS.

Following this review and comment period, a preferred alternative will be selected and evaluated for its effect on ESA-listed species. At that time, NMFS will determine the sufficiency of the section 10(a)(1)(B) permit applications and will publish a notice of availability in the Federal Register for review of the completed applications and the Final Environmental Impact Statement (FEIS). NMFS will make its decision regarding issuance of the permit following completion of



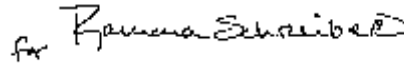
Register for review of the completed applications and the Final Environmental Impact Statement (FEIS). NMFS will make its decision regarding issuance of the permit following completion of the FEIS and permit application review period.

The enclosed information is in response to your stated preference for either the summary or the complete DEIS. For your convenience, you may download either of these documents from our website at www.nwr.noaa.gov/lhydro/hydroweb/ferc.htm (under the "Related Documents" heading). The HCPs may also be downloaded from this site for your review and comment. Electronic comments and other data should be submitted to robert.dach@noaa.gov.

Please send your written comments regarding the HCPs and the DEIS to the responsible person below. Also, please send one copy of your comments to me in Room 6117, Herbert C. Hoover Building, US Department of Commerce, Washington, DC 20230.

Responsible Person: Bob Dach
NMFS, NWR, Hydro Program
525 NE Oregon Street, Suite 420
Portland, Oregon 97232- 2737

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in dark ink, appearing to read "Susan Fruchter".

Susan Fruchter
NEP A Coordinator
Director, Office of Policy and
Strategic Planning

Enclosure